

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

MORI/CDF per C03234560

INFORMATION

February 23, 1974

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MEMORANDUM FOR: SECRETARY KISSINGER

FROM: WILLIAM L. STEARMAN *WLS*

SUBJECT: COSVN Resolution 12: Military and Political Guidelines for 1974-1975

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[REDACTED]

These new COSVN guidelines for 1974-1975 [REDACTED] based on a recent Lao Dong Party Central Committee resolution, indicate that Hanoi remains committed to victory in the South, but has abandoned all hope of a political settlement. While the Resolution refers to preparations for a large-scale offensive and to the necessity of a final military showdown with the GVN, it remains silent on the timing of a major attack and ambiguously calls for "step by step" victory. Communist weaknesses and GVN strengths are candidly acknowledged, and the Resolution expresses some fear of a preemptive GVN attack. Principal Communist strengths are defined as a strong military infrastructure and main force capability and the expectation that the GVN will be forced to weaken its defenses to cope with its own economic problems. Specific tasks for the immediate future include: continued sharp attacks on ARVN, further development of main forces, revival of the southern guerrilla movement and infrastructure, and expansion of "liberated areas." [REDACTED]

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25X1 [redacted] a final showdown will probably not occur until Hanoi has remedied acute weaknesses in its southern structure and expanded access to indispensable resources (e.g. southern rice and manpower). Significant limited attacks will occur, but the North Vietnamese will concentrate in coming months on bringing their political capabilities up to par with their much-improved main force posture.

Comment:

[redacted] the Communists have decided for the time being to pursue a strategy of attrition against the GVN. The COSVN guidelines clearly indicate that the NVA is ready for a strictly military confrontation with the GVN. However, poor performance by southern cadre and the GVN's grip over the countryside appear to be major constraints on initiating an attack this year or even later. In light of the North's own economic and other difficulties, these concerns suggest a possible Communist vulnerability to reverse attrition by the GVN.

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Report on COSVN Guidelines for 1974-1975

The guidelines reportedly are based on a recent resolution of the Lao Dong Central Committee and were briefed to cadre in late January. The following are the major themes and highlights of the COSVN instructions for 1974-1975.

-- The Communist position, as described in the briefing, is "one of preparing to wage war to finish the Saigon regime in the days ahead and of being ready to destroy its troops when they widen the war and strike us first." Indeed, the Party's decision to accept the Vietnam Agreement is defended as a tactic to allow a breathing period for another offensive.

-- The COSVN briefing specifically noted that the Communists "no longer entertain the illusion that there can be a political settlement." The document also ruled out any coalition government "once we have used force against the enemy."

-- The fundamental mission for 1974-1975 remains "ceaselessly to attack the enemy"; to continue the struggle with "armed" and "political violence" and "to win victory part by part."

-- Five missions are specified in the guidelines for immediate action: propaganda to divide the enemy and rally the revolution; military action to strongly attack the "enemy" and to build Communist forces; development and expansion of "liberated areas"; an accelerated political movement to develop Communist political and guerrilla infrastructure; and step by step victory over the GVN, particularly in the competition for support by the masses.

-- The COSVN briefing freely acknowledges the GVN's political and military strength, but emphasizes that GVN economic problems eventually will weaken its defenses.

-- The briefing also candidly admitted numerous Communist weaknesses: Communist-controlled population is sparse; the guerrilla movement and political infrastructure are weak; new manpower is not being recruited; two-thirds of the provincial troops and a majority of civilian laborers are northerners. The economy of "liberated areas" is dependent on the GVN and there is poor coordination among the three groups of military, political and proselyting activity.

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-- The COSVN briefing notes that the Soviets are giving more military assistance (including some SA-6's) than the Chinese, but are concerned over offending the United States. On the other hand, "the PRC has always promised much but delivered less." Implying that strings are sometimes attached to this assistance, the COSVN briefing emphasized that "this aid does not give the donors a right to order us about."

-- The briefing stated: "We will establish an Indochinese United Front to effect the Socialist development of Cambodia and Laos." In Cambodia, North Vietnamese relations with the Khmer Communists are described as good at the central, regional and province levels, but bad at the district and village levels.

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-- The new COSVN guidelines emphasize political rather than military action. Politics is the weakest area of Communist endeavor because there are few Communist assets in GVN areas and guerrillas are greatly understrength. The Communists made no progress in 1973 towards their aims in political struggle and military proselyting; the situation may be worse now than at the beginning of the cease-fire. Emphasis on recruitment in 1973 has not resulted in any great increase in local force strength. It is almost impossible to recruit -- much less build -- Party members in GVN areas due to tight security controls. One example of Communist weakness is the failure of the anticipated "rice war" to occur. There were not enough local cadre to purchase, collect and transport rice, and the NVA could not assume these roles.

-- A general offensive is a long-range plan and will not likely be executed now. Communist military forces are sufficiently strong to occupy a large part of the country, but VC infrastructure is so weak that new territories could not be effectively controlled. Future military action will be of limited scope (similar to the "test battle" in Quang Duc Province) and probably will be concentrated on MR-1 and 2. GVN MR-4 is the single most important target in South Vietnam; however, efforts to expand Communist territory in this area will be made through limited military actions.

-- The Communists take seriously a threat by the GVN to adopt similar tactics against the VC/NVA (e.g. "nibbling attacks" to expand territory and population control). COSVN guidelines explicitly recognize GVN strength, and most cadre realize that claims concerning a GVN collapse in 1974 are propaganda.

-- The United States would reintervene in Vietnam only in case of a general offensive and only through the use of air power.

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